

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 28, 2017

Honorable Ed Carnes  
Chief Judge  
Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals  
Frank M. Johnson, Jr. United States Courthouse  
One Church Street, Room 403  
Montgomery, Alabama 36104

Dear Chief Judge Carnes,

We are writing out of concern about the impending closure of the federal courthouse located at 30 W. Government Street in Panama City, Florida, and respectfully urge the Circuit Council, consistent with all applicable federal laws and regulations, to give every due consideration to the Northern District of Florida's Board of Judges' renewed request for an exemption from the Asset Management Program so that court can continue to be held in the Panama City Division.

On June 23, 2017, Northern District of Florida Chief Judge M. Casey Rodgers wrote to you on behalf of the Board of Judges urging reconsideration of the Circuit Council's March decision to deny the Board of Judges' January request for an approval of an exemption from the Asset Management Program for the Panama City Courthouse. The current lease on the Panama City Courthouse expires in December 2018, and the Board of Judges in the Northern District of Florida has determined that the current facility poses too great a safety and security risk to continue occupying the space and therefore will not renew the lease. Upon expiration of the current lease, the Panama City docket will be handled in Pensacola unless an appropriate accommodation can be found and approved. As you know, due to the sudden retirement of Judge Richard Smoak, whose chambers were in Panama City, there is currently no resident judge at this location.

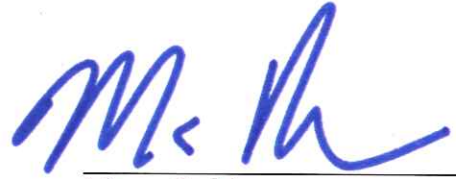
We understand that according to the Asset Management rules and Judicial Conference policy, a district must have a resident judge in a designated division in order to qualify for courtroom space in that division. However, given the retirement of Judge Smoak and the overwhelming workload demands of the district's docket in light of its authorized number of judgeships and geographic expanse, a determination has been made that placing a resident judge in the Panama City Division is not feasible at this time. Accordingly, we respectfully request that the Circuit Council consider these circumstances, together with the new information that has come to light regarding the possibility of an appropriate alternate facility, and grant Chief Judge Rodgers' June 23, 2017 request. We further request the Circuit Council to recommend approval of the same to the Judicial Conference Committee on Space and Facilities and that it do so in an expedited manner, given the current lease's December 2018 expiration.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter, and respectfully request you reconsider this decision to enable a continued federal court presence in Panama City.

Sincerely,



Bill Nelson  
U.S. Senator



Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator